

# Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Evacuated Students Need to be Accepted by Arizona Schools, Goddard and Horne Say**

(Phoenix, Ariz. - September 2, 2005) Arizona schools have a legal responsibility to promptly enroll students who have come to this state after being forced from their Gulf Coast homes by Hurricane Katrina, Attorney General Terry Goddard and State School Superintendent Tom Horne said today.

"These students need to be given a place in our schools as soon as possible," Goddard said. "It's the right thing to do, and it is also the law."

"The devastation of Hurricane Katrina is a national disaster, and Arizona will extend every available resource to educate any student who relocates to Arizona temporarily or permanently," Horne said.

Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, these children qualify as homeless and must be enrolled in the school district where they are temporarily living, Goddard said. They may not be turned away or delayed admission from public schools because they lack records that are normally required. These include academic records, birth certificates, immunization records, proof of residency or other documentation.

The students are entitled to the same services as any other student in the district, including transportation and special education.

Thousands of families from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama have been displaced by the hurricane. Many have joined family and friends in other states across the nation.

Federal funds are available to reimburse schools for educating these students under the McKinney-Vento Act. In the event such money is exhausted, Goddard and Horne said they will seek additional federal funding.

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Dear School Superintendents:

The destruction Hurricane Katrina brought to Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi has caused thousands of families to flee across the nation to seek safety and shelter. We anticipate that many families will find refuge in Arizona. We need to make their registration in Arizona schools as convenient as possible.

Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act, these children must be immediately enrolled in the school district where they are temporarily residing. The Act defines "homeless children and youth" as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate residence. They include those who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship; living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative accommodations, or living in emergency or transitional shelters.

Local school officials must ensure that homeless children are immediately enrolled in school, even if the child lacks the records normally required for enrollment (such as previous academic records, immunization records, birth certificates, proof of residency, or other documentation). Schools should use their best judgment when determining grade placement for these students who do not have scholastic records and may be unable to produce them. States and districts must provide homeless children with access to all programs and services available to other students, including transportation and special education. As homeless students, they qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and for Title I services.

Arizona's schools have an opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of these displaced families. Let's do our part to welcome them into our State and make this process as painless as possible.

Any questions regarding this matter should be directed to Mattie McVey at the Arizona Department of Education at (602) 542-4963 or to your school district attorney.

Sincerely,

Terry Goddard  
Arizona Attorney General

Tom Horne  
State School Superintendent